How to:
work with young people

Friends of the Earth

Working with young people can be tremendously rewarding and productive. Youth and Education Officer, Karen Jesnick and Local Groups Support Co-ordinator, Claudia Sartori explain ways to make the experience more effective, and fun

Young people are our future decision-makers and stakeholders. They are concerned about their environment and many already hold strong views about green issues. Enabling young people to discuss environmental problems, develop a deeper understanding and share their concerns can be a fulfilling experience both for you and for them.

Input from young people into a campaign can be invaluable too – a message of protest or action from the young really makes people take notice.

The prospect of standing up in front of a bunch of 11-13-year-olds can seem daunting, but it really is easier than you'd think. Do it once and it'll get even easier.

Top tip

Names matter. At school our Youth Officer introduces herself as Miss Jesnick, but at a youth club she's Karen.

Making initial contact

- **Contact a school in your area, offering to give a talk about Friends of the Earth, or a particular issue/campaign you are running in the area**
- **Find out from your Local Education Authority if there is a youth club in your area and then offer to run an activity for the group**
- **Local places of worship often run meetings for young people. Try contacting your nearest place and see if they would like your help with some environmental education**
- **Alternatively, if you or your friends have children or grandchildren you could organise an activity for them and their friends. There's huge educational potential even on a picnic to a local park. Just spending time outside could be an education for some of them.**

Doing it right

When working with children, keep on the right side of the law:

1 Get yourself a police check which can be obtained from the criminal records bureau for £12, see www.disclosure.gov.uk.

2 Never place yourself in a situation where you are alone with a child. If you're giving a talk at a school or youth club ask the teacher or youth leader to sit in on the activity.

3 Remember to consider health and safety issues when devising activities. If in doubt talk to the teacher or youth leader.

How to engage with young people

Talking to young people can be challenging, rewarding – and enjoyable. These few key tips will help you get the most out of the experience

1 Know your audience

When working with children and young people it's important to know who you are talking to.

- How old are they and what do they already know about the topic?
- When you were that age what was important to you? What made you excited or angry?

2 Be prepared

The best way to feel and be confident is to be prepared:

- What resources do you need for your session? Who is going to provide them?
- Will the teacher/youth leader be present in your session?
- Set clear aims and objectives – it's better to focus on one clear point rather than try to communicate everything at once.
- How long is your session? Shorter time slots (10-20 mins) are more manageable
- Open your session with a bang: a gimmick, particularly something visual, often helps grab young people's attention
- What method are you going to use? You may want to use more than one in a session. Are they appropriate for the age you're working with?
- Have a back-up activity in case things go more quickly than expected
- How are you going to round-off your session? Summarise what was learnt in the session. Maybe do a "show and tell" or a quick quiz
- The end. Use this part of the session to evaluate how it went. Did it meet your objectives? Did the young people enjoy it? Did you? What would you do differently next time?

3 In the classroom/youth club

- Be relaxed and enthusiastic
- Speak to young people as you would to adults
- Answer questions. If you don't know the answers, say so and offer to find out
- Encourage all participants to speak, and listen to their points of view
- Explain any technical points you make
- Use props or visual aids where possible
- Use a variety of techniques for short attention spans
- Only give out handouts when you're ready for them to be read.

Top tip

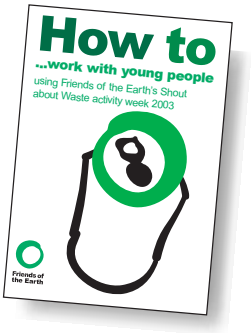
In schools ask the teacher for their class' sign for silence in case noise levels soar.

Shout about waste in November

Shout about is Friends of the Earth's annual activity week designed to unite local groups with schools and youth clubs.

Shout about week aims to raise awareness and inspire 11-13 year olds to take action within their schools and communities and to build long-lasting relationships between local groups and young people.

Each year we'll be shouting about a different topic. This year from 3-7 November we'll be getting het up about waste, rubbish and recycling and we want you to be involved.



Sign up and receive your free extended *How to* guide written specifically for local groups, containing pre-written talks, lesson plans and tips on methods and ways to involve young people. You'll also receive a copy of the *Shout about educators' pack* that has more suggestions for activities and worksheets that can be used with young people.

Generation game

Ashdown in print

Ashdown Friends of the Earth involved local children as part of the Real Food Send a Footprint Message to Tony Blair campaign in spring 2002. They borrowed lots of welly boots, bought some child-friendly paints, and invited passing kids to dip the boots in trays of paint and paint the message with their feet. While the children were busy getting messy, the group chatted to parents and explained the issue in more depth.

Tell me what you want: real food.

Portsmouth shake up the plot

Portsmouth Friends of the Earth set up the Can-do composting project in June 2002 to raise awareness of the importance of recycling and composting among local residents. The group visits primary schools where it gives talks and runs workshops on waste at home and in school. Group members are developing a composting demonstration site on their allotment so children can see composting in action. They also have a pond; numerous composters made from recycled materials, a wormery and raised beds growing fruit, vegetables and flowers.

The group has visited over 20 schools and has secured funding for another year. So successful is the project that Portsmouth City Council is now working in partnership with Portsmouth Friends of the Earth to deliver Can-do composting as well.

Can-do composting: Portsmouth.

Teesside

Carole Zagrovic works with local communities in Teesside. She took 15 local secondary school pupils and a teacher out and about, each armed with a camera. The young people had the task of photographing their local environment as tourism agents, focusing on areas where tourists may like to go and the sites they should avoid. Places that didn't make the must-see spots were close to the huge chemical site which is also near where many of the kids live.

After downloading the photos the young people spent time discussing vandalism and the visual impact of the poorer areas. They also talked about how individuals, local authorities and community groups could take responsibility for their own environment. The photos ended up as part of the young people's exam work and have been professionally mounted and hung throughout the school.

Dormanstown landmarks in the album – not one of Teesside's top ten tourist spots.

"Giving to the next generation means a lot to me – it is their future. I enjoy trying to make them aware of their planet, enabling them to make a difference. Once you realise you are engaging young people it makes it all worthwhile." **Auriel Glanville, Merton Friends of the Earth**

Ways to make waste issues fun

Whatever activities you choose remember that working with young people should be fun. The more you do it, the more confident you become, and by working with young people you have the opportunity to shape lives. Here are five methods you might like to try:

1 Role-play

Role-play allows young people to be creative and to think about situations from other people's viewpoints. You could give the young people a scenario to act out, or provide them with characters to play. For example ask them to role-play dropping litter at break time. The other roles could be the students, head teacher and a bird.

2 Music

Music can be used in lots of ways, for example, playing background music can help to set the mood of an activity or a song could help the group guess the topic. Getting young people to pick their favourite song and then change the lyrics so they're about an environmental issue, or to write their own song is a good way to engage groups. Making musical instruments out of "rubbish" is a practical example of re-using waste.

3 Arts and crafts

Useful when working one-to-one or with very large groups – whether it's getting children to design a poster about a campaign issue, or creating a whole school mosaic to replace a graffiti area. You could also make puppets and perform a show. Collect leaves, twigs and other found objects and use them to make a picture. Or make kites to demonstrate wind power. Older students could make recycled furniture out of old wood and junk.

4 Quizzes

Top tip

Dress smartly, like a teacher, so the children will concentrate on your message and the session's props

Quizzes are a good way to see if people have learnt anything. A quiz can vary from a simple hands up if you know the answer to something more formal with teams and rounds. For a more active quiz, label each corner of the room a, b, c, d. Then give four possible answers to each question and ask the young people to vote with their feet. Quizes can be on any topic. Be sure to tailor the questions to the age group you're working with - trial them first if you have any doubts about what can interest 11-13 year olds.

5 Treasure hunt

This activity is good for an active group, and works best if the young people are old enough to wander around in small groups by themselves. Simply hide different clues around the site; each clue should lead to the next one. If done outside this can be a good way to get young people noticing things about their environment that they may not have spotted.

School talks and lesson plans on natural habitats, climate change, food and farming as well as waste can be found at www.foe.co.uk/learning

Resources available

Friends of the Earth has a number of resource packs, information booklets and leaflets that can be used with or by children. These can be obtained by calling free on 0808 800 1111

Primary (under 10 years)

Madabout series

Cartoon-style leaflets that open out into colourful posters. Choose from waste and recycling, natural habitats, rainforests, climate change, air pollution, food. Free.

Secondary (11+ years)

Information booklets

Big issues easily explained, suitable for use with or by young people. Choose from food and farming, energy and climate change, waste and recycling and wind power. Free.

Shout about waste pack

Essential resource pack. Free.

Priced items can be ordered from SSU, 020 7490 1555

Independence series

Photocopiable resource books, (six different titles available including urban sprawl and climate change). £6.95 each.

The food we eat

Educators' resource pack. £8.50 each.